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Chairman: Mr. KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 82: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (A/51/46, A/C.4/51/L.3*)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the attention of Committee members to the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, contained in document A/51/46, and to draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3*.

2. Mr. MEIER-KLODT (Germany), introducing the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and the draft resolution on the subject, said that the Committee had been established by General Assembly resolution 913 (X) of 3 December 1955, in recognition of the concern of countries about the hazards of radioactive fallout from testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere and the need to collect and evaluate information on the effects of ionizing radiation on man and his environment. Changes had taken place since that time, but the subject had not lost its topicality. Events connected with the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station were still vivid in people's memories, and the accident afforded a reminder that the consequences of serious accidents could be widespread and that the need for guidance and information on radiation and its effects remained essential.

3. After briefly reviewing the scientific aspect of the problem of sources and the effects of ionizing radiation on man, he noted that the reports of the Scientific Committee considered the effects of ionizing radiation on plants and animals in the human environment. It was the first time the Scientific Committee had addressed those effects, and one of the important results of the investigations conducted was the conclusion that, apart from some severe accidents, no apparent damage had been observed in individual organisms and populations from emissions of radionuclides to the atmosphere, to water bodies and to the ground as a result of the operation of nuclear power facilities or the conduct of industrial and medical operations.

4. The Scientific Committee was proceeding with a new programme of work to evaluate further sources and effects of ionizing radiation, and an understanding of the underlying mechanisms of radiation interactions would improve the assessments of radiation risks.

5. The method of operation and quality of the reports of the Scientific Committee over the years of its existence had made an important contribution to the quest for a safe radiation environment. Notwithstanding the presence of representatives of different countries and different scientific philosophies in its composition, its report had again been adopted by consensus.

6. In conclusion, he thanked all the sponsors of the draft resolution contained in document A/C.4/51/L.3*, and noted with pleasure that Belarus, Malaysia and Thailand had joined the sponsors.

7. Mr. EDWARDS (Marshall Islands) said that during the period of the United Nations Trusteeship of the Pacific Islands, the Marshall Islands had been the site of 66 nuclear-weapon tests conducted by the Administering Authority. After the Marshall Islands became a member of the United Nations in September 1991, his country had begun to express deep concern at the effects of atomic

radiation. Such radiation had had negative effects on the health of the children, women and men living in the Marshall Islands. In addition, it was evident that the scale of the impact of radiation on the environment was far greater than had been thought. Several areas of the atolls were still off-limits, as a result of which the displaced populations continued to lead a nomadic way of life.

8. The testing of nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands was a matter of more than simply historical interest. There were direct indications that the effects were long-lasting, and they continued to be experienced by persons living today. Accordingly, it would seem that the international community had a moral obligation to those who had silently suffered the effects of atomic radiation.

9. His delegation, while welcoming the reports of the Scientific Committee, nevertheless found that the reports had not been informative enough, and failed to address the concerns raised by his Government. Not a single resolution had been adopted on assistance to victims of radiation, and international cooperation could not be termed a complete success.

10. His Government was grateful to President Clinton and his Administration for disclosing previously classified information. That was necessary in order to enable his Government fully to understand the implications for its planning for the health and well-being of its citizens.

11. It was worth recalling the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the use of or threat of the use of nuclear weapons, which had recognized that all members of the international community had an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

12. His delegation noted the timely adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and called on all Governments and international organizations to consider giving appropriate assistance for the cleaning up of areas affected by radioactive pollution.

13. With a view to achieving concrete results in the work of the Committee, his delegation intended to submit certain amendments to the draft resolution under the agenda item under discussion, and hoped that they would be given serious consideration.

14. Mr. SURIE (India) said that the use of atomic energy to generate power and its applications in medicine, industry and agriculture were becoming increasingly vital for improving standards of living, health and quality of life, particularly in developing countries. In that context, the work of the Scientific Committee was important in providing a balanced perspective of the effects, levels and risks of atomic radiation. He commended the Scientific Committee for its work, and noted the completion in 1996 of a further important scientific annex to its report, conveying the latest evaluation of the sources and effects of ionizing radiation. The reports of the Scientific Committee were used as reference documents by scientists worldwide and served as a basis for developing international and national radiation protection standards.

15. In its continuous efforts to update the available data in order to make health risk estimations as realistic as possible, the Scientific Committee had introduced into the discussion newly emerging concepts such as radio-adaptive response and biological defence mechanisms following exposure to low doses of ionizing radiation. In that context, his delegation also wished to acknowledge the useful contribution made by representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRD) and the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements (ICRUM). His Government had cooperated closely in the work of the Scientific Committee, and Indian scientists had actively participated in its meetings in Vienna where they had made positive contributions in the preparation of its annual reports.

16. His delegation was convinced that nuclear power was the technology which, in the foreseeable future, had the greatest potential to provide sufficient amounts of energy with minimal emission of greenhouse gases. As one of the largest isotope producers in the world, India was in the forefront of research into nuclear medicine, the use of isotopes in agriculture, and various other applications.

17. Fairly dense populations had been living for generations in certain areas of Kerala State, along India's southwest coast, which was one of the world's highest natural background radiation areas. A more precise understanding of the biological and health effects of chronic low-dose exposures, if indeed there were any, could be obtained through intensified scientific studies on such populations. The studies carried out to date revealed that adult and especially newborn children living in the high background radiation areas of Kerala did not have more cytogenetic abnormalities than those in the normal background radiation areas. Those studies had been extended to cover still wider populations and genetic epidemiological aspects. Further studies on defence mechanisms, possibly using material derived from populations living in areas with high background radiation, would be of interest to his delegation.

18. India's nuclear programme accorded a prime position to safety in all its activities, through the entire nuclear fuel cycle from prospecting and mining of ores to management of waste. Safety was an important subject for research and development in the various institutions of the Department of Atomic Energy. Over the years his Government had progressively evolved its regulatory system. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board complied with the prevailing international norms of regulatory practice and had carried out its function of monitoring India's nuclear programme and the level of safety at installations that handled nuclear materials. India was one of the signatories of the Convention on Nuclear Safety and his Government was currently in the process of ratifying that instrument. At the current session India was one of the sponsors of the draft resolution under agenda item 82.

19. Ms. DONG Guilan (China) said that, at its forty-sixth session held in Vienna, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Nuclear Radiation had discussed and adopted the report on the effects of ionizing radiation on plants and animals in the environment. The report, based on careful analysis and research of extensively collected data, reflected the latest findings concerning the level of atomic radiation and its effects. It not only enriched mankind's scientific knowledge of atomic radiation, but also

provided an objective and fair judgement for the formulation by Member States of their policies for nuclear development and utilization of nuclear technology.

20. The interrelationship of environment and development was currently a universal concern of mankind. Since atomic radiation was directly related to development, environment and health, the work of the Scientific Committee in that field was particularly significant. The Chinese Government attached great importance to those issues and had followed a unified policy in that field. The prevention of damage to the environment and health caused by radioactive waste had been incorporated as an important element in the Chinese Government's national agenda for the 21st century. His Government would, as always, continue to give its full support to the work of the Scientific Committee and it hoped that the Committee would further deepen its studies of the level of ionizing radiation and its effects. Such an approach would enable it to collect more important data concerning developing countries, which would make the report more informative and help to publicize studies of atomic radiation and protection of the environment.

21. Mr. CORVIN (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, whose Member States had sponsored the draft resolution, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Slovakia, and Iceland and Norway which had aligned themselves with his statement, said that for over 40 years the Scientific Committee, executing its mandate competently and basing its findings on scientific facts, had informed and educated the world on the effects, levels and risks of atomic and ionizing radiation. The Committee's reports had deservedly won recognition in the international scientific community and in many instances had served as the basis for drawing up both national and international standards for protection against the harmful effects of radiation. The European Union also wished to commend the cooperation that existed between the Scientific Committee and other United Nations and international organizations, in particular ICRP, the International Agency for Research on Cancer and ICRUM. The European Union urged the continuation and further deepening of that cooperation.

22. The European Union welcomed the completion of the Scientific Committee's work on an annex on the sources and effects of ionizing radiation on man and his environment. His delegation looked forward to the Committee's next report, due in 1998-99, dealing with the effect of radiation on the environment, which was expected to include recently available information on the effects of the Chernobyl accident.

23. The discussions at the Special Session of the General Assembly in June 1997 on the review and appraisal of Agenda 21 would present an important opportunity to assess further progress in the implementation of the relevant recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The results of the Special Session should be taken into account in the preparation of the Scientific Committee's next report. The European Union had no doubt that the Scientific Committee would continue its work to the same high standard as before and assured it of its support and cooperation.

24. Mr. ZAKI (Egypt) said that his country had been one of the original members of the Scientific Committee and supported its important work. Mention should also be made of the support that that Committee received from the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP) and IAEA. Cooperation between the Scientific Committee and various bodies of the United Nations must be continued.

25. The hazards of atomic radiation were undoubtedly increasing in those regions where there were nuclear facilities not under international control. Such facilities existed in the Middle East, where they were a threat to recent development. The case of peace was incompatible with a lack of candour, and for that reason it was important that the parties that had nuclear facilities or programmes in the region should place them under the control of IAEA. That would be the first of a series of measures designed to prevent the proliferation of nuclear facilities.

26. The work of the Scientific Committee was of invaluable assistance to international and regional measures in the field of radiological protection. His country held its work in high regard and was therefore pleased to mention that it was one of the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.4/51/L.3.

27. Mr. SALAH (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the question of atomic radiation attracted considerable attention and was a matter for concern in all international, regional and national forums.

28. He commended the efforts of the Scientific Committee and also those of the scientific establishments and international organizations and bodies that promoted a better understanding of the effects of atomic radiation.

29. The assurances by a number of nuclear Powers, in particular China and France, that they would adhere to agreements on the cessation of nuclear testing and would severely restrict the disposal of nuclear wastes allayed his country's anxiety, but his delegation nevertheless pointed out that it was in favour of the complete prohibition of all nuclear testing.

30. In the opinion of his country, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons did not fulfil the aspirations of peoples with respect to the complete prohibition of nuclear testing. It did not indicate a specific timetable for the destruction of the vast nuclear arsenals of certain States.

31. Nuclear energy could be used in the interests of mankind, thus promoting the happiness and well-being of people and ensuring satisfaction of their needs and demands. The developed countries had achieved significant progress in the utilization of nuclear energy in such fields as food safety and health, and he hoped that nuclear energy would also be used for such purposes in the developing countries.

32. At the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, his delegation had drawn attention to the danger of nuclear radiation in connection with the Israeli reactor at Dimona and had called on the international community to take measures to ensure that Israel submitted all its nuclear facilities to inspection by IAEA in accordance with resolution 34/89. The most recent scientific reports confirmed the statement by his country to the effect that atomic radiation caused by the operation of the Israeli reactor at Dimona was harmful to the environment and to the life of the population of the Middle East, North Africa and the Mediterranean region. His country appealed urgently to the international community to oblige Israel to comply with the Treaty on the Non-

Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to place its nuclear installations under international control, thereby ensuring that they were used exclusively for peaceful purposes. There would be neither stability nor peace in the region as long as Israel insisted on keeping its nuclear arsenal to terrorize the peoples of the region.

33. His delegation emphasized the gravity of the situation and hoped that decisive measures would be taken to put an end to nuclear activity which had a harmful impact on the environment and on people's lives.

AGENDA ITEM 93: QUESTION OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE RELEVANT ORGANS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

34. Mr. HORBACH (Netherlands) said that according to the annotated provisional list (A/51/100) consideration of the item, which had been included for the first time in the agenda of the thirty-second session of the General Assembly, was deferred from year to year. No documents had been submitted on the item for the current session and none were expected, nor was there a draft decision on the matter. Accordingly, with reference to resolution 48/264 of 29 July 1994 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, he proposed, with the support of Mr. DUMITRIU (Romania), that the General Assembly be recommended not to include the item in its agenda for the fifty-second session.

35. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to adopt the proposal that the General Assembly should be recommended to delete the item from its agenda.

36. It was so decided.

37. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 93.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 11.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 19: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (continued)

38. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) asked whether consultations would be held on the resolution concerning Western Sahara. A draft resolution was currently circulating among delegations, and his delegation wished to know the identity of its sponsor or sponsors so as to be able to submit amendments and discuss matters of concern with them. The draft took no account of the settlement plan or of the ceasefire that had been achieved, and the obligations of the United Nations were vaguely worded, a fact which might give rise to misunderstanding.

39. The CHAIRMAN said that no official draft resolution had reached the Secretariat. When it was submitted, the Committee would have enough time to hold consultations on it.

40. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) regretted the lack of openness on the question of the draft resolution, which was already circulating unofficially. It was unfortunate that its sponsors or supporters had not had the courtesy to consult

his delegation, as Morocco was the party most immediately affected by the question of Western Sahara. His delegation had no alternative but to await the issuance of the official draft resolution in order to ascertain whether or not the text reflected its proposed amendments. If that were the case, his country might even join the sponsors of the draft resolution which might thus be adopted by consensus, as had happened the previous year. It was to be hoped that the Secretariat would make the draft resolution known to his delegation as soon as it was issued officially.

41. The CHAIRMAN assured the representative of Morocco that the Secretariat remained willing to cooperate at all times.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.